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Bridging The Resource Gap

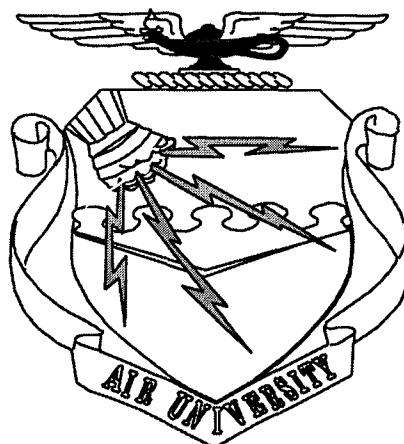
AUTHOR

Abel H. Villarreal

Major, U.S. Army

Class

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With the Department of Defense under the scrutiny of the American public and the media always nearby, how should the military best prepare the leaders of tomorrow to cope with change during fiscally austere times? In my opinion, the key to bridging what I will call the “resource gap” is threefold: a solid and standardized training institution, continuing education on a self-development basis, and professional education and training throughout one’s career. The combination of education and work experience prepares one to manage public funds efficiently. We owe it to America to remain proficient and to be prudent fiscal managers, particularly during times of the shrinking budget, by maintaining a fiscal prowess. Most Army officers do not receive resource management training. However, as leaders and as custodians of public funds, we must be prudent and frugal fiscal managers. Funds have become a scare commodity. As leaders we must fight for adequate funding to train the force, to equip the force and to maintain the force. To do this we must learn everything we can about fiscal management. An early investment in fiscal awareness will mold frugal and prudent leaders capable of giving Americans the “most bang for the buck.” What is the bottomline? Simply that it is time for change in the military educational system. It is time to go the next step and mold young warriors into prudent fiscal managers. If America is to survive the outrageous and out of control deficit and win the national debt, we must bridge the resource gap by formalizing resource management instruction at all levels. The leaders of tomorrow must be the absolute best: tactically and technically proficient warriors and frugal and prudent resource mangers. Bridging the resource gap is the key to conducting business during the next century. America can not afford anything less.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY-----	i
INTRODUCTION -----	1
DISCUSSION-----	1
CONCLUSION-----	6
RECOMMENDATION-----	7

INTRODUCTION

The Department of Defense is rapidly changing and has experienced constant turbulence; in fact, the change is almost frightening. During the Carter and Reagan years, tremendous amounts of money were consumed equipping the world's mightiest force. With the demise of the Berlin Wall and the Soviet Union more change, only this time downward, has occurred and remains on the horizon. In both cases change has been the constant. The challenge lying ahead is discovering the secret to cope with rapid change, whether upward or downward, in the most efficient and effective manner. With the Department of Defense under the scrutiny of the American public and the media always nearby, how should the military best prepare the leaders of tomorrow to cope with change during fiscally austere times? In my opinion, the key to bridging what I will call the "resource gap" is threefold: a solid and standardized training institution, continuing education on a self-development basis, and professional education and training throughout one's career.

DISCUSSION

Let us begin by discussing a typical career path of an Army Officer and the formal or institutionalized training he/she receives. The military education path is threefold -- the precommissioning phase, the company grade officer phase, and the field grade officer phase. To become a commissioned officer, an individual must either attend the United States Army Military Academy at West Point or a University ROTC program and complete all the requirements in order to be commissioned as a Second Lieutenant.

Another option for enlisted soldiers is to be accepted into the Officer Candidate School or the Green to Gold program, complete all the requirements and then be commissioned as Second Lieutenant. All of the above programs fall into the precommissioning phase. Typically an individual takes approximately four years to complete the precommissioning requirements. What are the typical requirements? Generally speaking precommissioned soldiers spend time learning how to lead soldiers. Typically troop leading skills, land navigation, physical fitness, military history, marksmanship, basic maintenance and basic survival skills are the core of the training program. Nowhere have I mentioned Resource Management; yet, many resources are required and consumed during precommissioning training. It takes four years to mold young adults into warriors that may someday be called upon to defend our precious nation, and, in some cases, with little to no notice. A tremendous amount of money, personnel, and equipment must be readily available to mentor, coach and mold these future "Warriors" and yet resource management is not one of the core subjects (Food for thought!). Maybe it is time we change the precommissioning curriculum and expose future leaders to the world of Resource Management to start early in teaching them to be good stewards of national resources.

The second phase of military education is the Company Grade phase. The Company Grade covers the period of time an officer spends as a second lieutenant to captain, which is approximately eight to ten years of service. When a second lieutenant enters the Army, he or she begins by attending an Officer Basic Course at their basic branch, such as Infantry, Armor, Air Defense, Artillery, Engineer, Chemical, Military Police, etc. The Officer Basic Course is structured similarly to the precommissioning phase

and builds on that foundation. Typically troop leading skills, land navigation, physical fitness, military history, marksmanship, maintenance, basic survival skills and branch specific are taught in more depth than the precommissioning phase. During the maintenance block of instruction, Resource Management is covered in somewhat of a limited basis. The focus is more logistics (maintenance and accountability) than fiscal responsibility. The officer then heads off to his first duty assignment to serve as a Platoon Leader. The Platoon Leader spends most of his/her time planning exercises that focus on warfighting, in order to prepare for, God forbid, war. Again, many resources are consumed during field training exercises and garrison operations maintaining vehicles and equipment. During marksmanship training and large scale deployment, additional resources are consumed yet, fiscal accountability is not a Platoon Leader responsibility. The Platoon Leader may get the opportunity to work as an Executive Officer or as an Assistant Staff Officer. Approximately one out of four or five platoon leaders get the opportunity to manage morale, welfare and recreation funds or the unit budget for a short period of time. Generally, the officer relies on higher headquarters (Division or the Installation) for technical advice. Virtually no formal training exists to teach young officers how to manage unit funds, unless he/she is fortunate enough to attend a Resource Management Course at the Finance and Accounting School (these courses are generally offered to officers holding a Comptroller functional area). At about the three to five year point, the officer attends an Officer Advanced Course that continues to build warfighting skills through doctrine, tactics and techniques instruction. Additionally, computer simulation exercises expose officers to the bigger picture but no time is spent on fiscal

accountability (Resource Management) and responsibility. Most officers graduate from the Advanced Course and find themselves serving as a Company or Battery Commander. Either before or immediately following Command, company grade officers attend the Combined Arms Service Staff School (CAS3). This generally occurs at the five-to-eight year point. The officer is finally exposed to a formal resource management block of instruction that is further reinforced with a practical exercise. To this point, formal Resource Management training has been limited, yet officer(s) are charged with the responsibility of maintaining and accounting for millions of dollars worth of equipment, facilities, and the health and welfare of soldiers. The irony of the situation is that, although no formal Resource Management training has been provided, the officer is held accountable for his/her action(s).

During the Field Grade Officer phase, generally during the eighth to twelfth year of service, one attends Command and General Staff College (CGSC) and receives a block of instruction on the Army Planning, Programming, Budgeting and Execution System (PPBES): the big picture. The officer expends half of his/her career leading soldiers and consuming resources before receiving a formal block of instruction on the fiscal system/management. Upon completion of CGSC, the officer reports to a duty assignment to serve with troops. If the officer is assigned as a Battalion Executive Officer, he/she is held accountable for overseeing the unit budget, while a subordinate staff officer (the S4) directly manages the budget. By this time most officers are approaching thirteen to fifteen years of service. It seems more prudent to conduct resource management training earlier in an officer's career.

I have briefly described the career path of a commissioned officer and addressed the lack of formal resource management training. Next, I will discuss resource management education on a self development basis. Every day the media seems to focus on the deficit and the national debt. You may have heard horror stories about the Department of Defense squandering away funds on six hundred dollar coffee pots. Why do I care, after all I am a warrior? (Ah yes, the warrior mentality versus fiscal accountability.) Warrior toys (M1A1 Abrams tanks, M2/M3 Bradley vehicles, Patriot missiles, Howitzers, and Apache helicopters) cost money. The Army is charged with the mission of maintaining the best equipped, best trained force in the world in order to deter war or to win a war as quickly as possible when called upon. The implied mission is to safeguard soldiers, equipment and facilities necessary to protect our most precious resource: freedom. The mission equates to getting the most bang for the buck through frugal fiscal accountability. The American public places special trust and confidence in each officer, including being held accountable for one's actions. Congress appropriates adequate funds to accomplish the military mission. The services, in turn, must exercise frugal and prudent measures to get the "most bang for the buck." To fulfill that charge, we must all strive (as the Army says) to be the best financial managers we can be. The implication is to invest time researching and learning the budgetary process. It means doing the right thing, because it is the right thing to do -- not necessarily the easiest. As professionals we must be the best resource managers possible. The implication is to learn through formal and informal training in order to preserve scarce resources. That may mean telling the boss "NO," with a high degree of certainty and confidence. The best way to do that is to become technically proficient in

resource management. As officers, we must indulge in self-study. Some of that time should include learning something about managing funds. After all, our nation depends on us to make the best decisions possible with its hard earned tax dollars. Be all you can be by indulging in a good self study program that includes resource management.

Lastly, as professional resource managers/comptrollers, we are afforded several educational and employment opportunities. The Army Finance School teaches us Resource Management, Budget (to include tactical budgeting), and PPBES. Additionally, opportunities to earn a Masters Degree while learning Advanced Resource Management are offered at Syracuse University. Some Comptrollers attend the Advanced Resource Management Course (Syracuse) or the Professional Military Comptrollership Course (Maxwell Air Force Base). The point is that the Army provides Comptrollers, Budget Analysts and Accountants numerous resource management training opportunities. Generally upon the completion of the training, the individual serves at a Division, Major Army Command, Department of the Army, or the Department of Defense as a Resource Manager. The combination of education and work experience prepares one to manage public funds efficiently. We owe it to America to remain proficient and to be prudent fiscal managers, particularly during times of the shrinking budget, by maintaining a fiscal prowess.

CONCLUSION

Most officers do not receive resource management training. However, as leaders and as custodians of public funds, we must be prudent and frugal fiscal managers. Funds have become a scare commodity. As leaders we must fight for adequate funding to train the force, to equip the force and to maintain the force. To do this we must learn everything we can about fiscal management. Additionally, the media coupled with public awareness demands we carefully manage taxpayers' hard earned money. As the threat changes and we prepare for the twenty-first century, we must rethink the way we do business. Our future leaders must be technically and tactically expert. Additionally, they must learn to be efficient and effective managers and custodians of public funds. The best way to ensure this is accomplished is to revamp the military's institutionalized training system. To use an analogy, one does not stay fit by putting off an exercise program until we reach middle age adulthood. Likewise, junior leaders must learn fiscal awareness early. An early investment in fiscal awareness will mold frugal and prudent leaders capable of giving Americans the "most bang for the buck."

RECOMMENDATION

What is the bottomline? Simply that it is time for change in the military educational system. It is time to go the next step and mold young warriors into prudent fiscal managers. If America is to survive the outrageous and out of control deficit and win the national debt, we must bridge the resource gap by formalizing resource management instruction at all levels. Bridging the resource gap is the key to conducting business during the next century. I recommend that TRADOC develop and incorporate Resource

Management blocks of instruction for the precommissioning and the company grade phases of training. This approach will ensure tomorrow's leaders remain the best tactically and technically proficient warriors, in the world, as well as frugal and prudent resource managers. America can not afford anything less.